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Source: *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London*, 1977, Vol. 40, No. 2 (1977), pp. 321-337

Published by: Cambridge University Press on behalf of School of Oriental and African Studies

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# JINA ṚṢABHA AS AN AVATĀRA OF VIṢṆU

By PADMANABH S. JAINI

*Avatāra*, or the periodical incarnation of the deity, is a cardinal doctrine of the Vaiṣṇava sect of Brahmanical Hinduism. The increasing number of the *avatāras* is an indication of the popularity of this doctrine both among the theologians and among the devout laity. The modest list of three (Varāha, Kūrma, and Matsya) of the Brāhmaṇa literature<sup>1</sup> grows into a list of 10 traditional *avatāras* (Matsya, Kūrma, Varāha, Nṛsimha, Vāmana, Paraśurāma, Rāma, Kṛṣṇa, Buddha, and Kalkin) in the *Mahābhārata*, and ends up in a still longer list of 22 in the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*.<sup>2</sup> The latter has in its inflated list quite a few 'minor' (*aṃśa*) *avatāras*, mostly consisting of names of great sages renowned for their austerities and learning, e.g. Nārada, Nara, Nārāyaṇa, Kapila, Dattātreyā, Ṛṣabha, and Veda-Vyāsa.

The purpose of an *avatāra* is 'to serve the righteous, to destroy the wicked, and to establish the right', as proclaimed in the *Bhagavadgītā*.<sup>3</sup> As a result, an *avatāra* is associated with the task of a forceful destruction of a demon (*asura*) (e.g. Rāvaṇa in the case of Rāma) or of the demonic (e.g. the *kṣatriyas* in the case of Paraśurāma). The *aṃśavatāras* on the other hand are solely concerned with the revelation of the divine truth, and are therefore, more in the tradition of a *guru*, the propagators of the faith.

The declaration of the Lord of the *Gītā* (x, 41) that whatever being shows 'supernal manifestation' (*vibhūtimat*) or majesty or vigour is sprung from a fraction of his glory, may be taken as an open sanction for conferring the status of an *avatāra* on any person of an exalted nature. Nevertheless, the inclusion of the Buddha in the list of the *avatāras* must sound incredible as he evidently is not only an adversary of Viṣṇu but is opposed to the very theistic conception of the Vaiṣṇava religion.<sup>4</sup> The full story of the 'avatarization' of this great *śramaṇa* is shrouded in mystery. More or less all major Purāṇas follow the lead of the *Mahābhārata*,<sup>5</sup> and confine their account of this great *avatāra* to only a couple of lines. The account invariably consists of the repetition of the fiction that the [anti-Vedic] preaching of the Buddha had [also] the divine purpose of destroying the *asuras*, who as a result of his teaching desisted from offering the sacrifices and thus ceased to be a danger to the gods! The credit for assigning this *avatāra* a more generous role goes probably to Jayadeva, the twelfth-century Vaiṣṇava poet who in his *Gītagovinda*<sup>6</sup> emphasized the great compassion of the Buddha [towards the animals slaughtered in the Vedic sacrifices].

The present paper proposes to examine yet another case of a *śramaṇa* turned into an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu. This pertains to Ṛṣabha, the first of the 24 *tīrthaṅkaras* of the Jains, who is cast into the role of a 'minor' or partial (*aṃśa*) *avatāra* by the author of the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*.<sup>7</sup> According to the latter,

<sup>1</sup> See J. Dowson, *A classical dictionary of Hindu mythology*, eleventh ed. (repr.), London, 1968, 34-5.

<sup>2</sup> *Śrīmad Bhāgavata* [henceforth *Bhāg.*] vi, viii, 13-19 (Gītā Press).

<sup>3</sup> *Bhagavadgītā*, iv, 7-8.

<sup>4</sup> See P. S. Jaini, 'Śramaṇas: their conflict with Brahmanical society', in J. W. Elder (ed.), *Chapters in Indian civilization*, I, Dubuque, Iowa, Kendall/Hunt, 1970, 41-81.

<sup>5</sup> xii, 46, 107.

<sup>6</sup> i, 1, 9.

<sup>7</sup> *Bhāg.* v, iii-vii.

Rṣabha is an incarnation of Viṣṇu who 'descended' to earth in order to establish the *śramaṇa-dharma* of the naked ascetics (*vāta-raśanānām śramaṇānām ṛṣṇām . . .*).<sup>8</sup> The study enables us to observe the extraordinary manner in which a Vaiṣṇava apologist, while denouncing the Jain faith, appropriates the central figure of that religion by the device of the doctrine of *avatāra*.

The main sources for the Jain account of Rṣabha are the Jain canonical texts like the *Kalpasūtra*<sup>9</sup> and the *Jambudvīpa-prajñapti*,<sup>10</sup> and a large number of Jain Purāṇas of the classical period, notably the *Ādipurāṇa*<sup>11</sup> of the Digambara ācārya Jinasena (c. ninth century), and the *Triṣaṣṭi-śālākā-puruṣa-caritra*<sup>12</sup> of the Śvetāmbara ācārya Hemacandra (thirteenth century). Barring a few minor details, the Digambara and the Śvetāmbara accounts show a remarkable agreement on the main events in the legendary life of Rṣabha<sup>13</sup> as summarized below.

According to the Jain tradition, 24 *tīrthāṅkaras* 'ford-makers' (i.e. saviours) appear in each time cycle which consists of six regressive (*avasarpinī*) and six progressive (*utsarpinī*) periods during which time there is a gradual decline and progress of civilization respectively. Rṣabha was the first of the 24 *tīrthāṅkaras* of the present time cycle, whereas Mahāvīra (the historical Nigaṇṭha Nātaputta of the Buddhist and Jain canons) was the last of them. Rṣabha thus flourished some billions of years ago in the regressive half of the present cycle towards the close of the third period. Prior to this there was the golden age during which time conditions similar to paradise (*bhogabhūmi*) prevailed upon the earth. There were, for instance, wish-fulfilling trees (*kalpavṛkṣas*) instead of orchards, and only the 'patriarch' (*kulakara*) in the place of kings. There was no accumulation like the caste system or the graduated system of four *āśramas* culminating in *mokṣa*. All marriages were happy for the simple reason that a couple gave birth only to a single pair of mixed twins who duly married each other. All this was fast disappearing towards the close of the third period when in Ayodhyā Rṣabha was born to Nābhi, the fourteenth *kulakara*, and his wife Marudevī.

In the course of time Rṣabha was married to his twin sister Sumaṅgalā who bore him a son called Bharata. The latter became the first *cakravartin* and gave his name to the subcontinent of India (Bhāratavarṣa). His twin sister Brāhmī was the first to learn the art of writing (hence the name *Brāhmī-lipi*) devised by her father. Rṣabha is said to have taken another wife by the name of Sunandā who had been 'widowed' by the death of her 'natural' husband,<sup>14</sup> the first infantile death which marked the end of the golden age (when premature death was unknown) and foreshadowed the beginning of the fourth period aptly named *duḥṣamāsuṣamā* 'more sorrow and less happiness'. Sunandā bore Rṣabha twins called Bāhubalī and Sundarī, who were followed by 94 sons. According to the age-old custom the two brothers would have taken their own twin sisters as their wives. But Rṣabha foresaw the beginning of the new age and got his eldest son Bharata married to Sundarī, the twin sister of Bāhubalī,

<sup>8</sup> . . . *dharmān darśayitukāmo vātaraśanānām śramaṇānām ṛṣṇām ūrdhvamanthinām śuklayā tanuvāvatatāra*. *Bhāg.* v, iii, 20.

<sup>9</sup> *Kalpasūtra*, tr. H. Jacobi, SBE, xxii, 1884, 281-5. Also W. Norman Brown, *A descriptive and illustrative catalogue of miniature paintings of the Jaina Kalpasūtra*, Washington, D.C., 1934.

<sup>10</sup> Together with *Vṛtti* by Śānticaṇḍra, Bombay edition, 1920.

<sup>11</sup> *Ādipurāṇa* (parts 1 and 2), Sanskrit text with Hindi tr. by Pannalal Jain, Kashi, Bhāratīya Jñānapīṭha, 1963-5.

<sup>12</sup> Tr. by Helen M. Johnson, GOS, LI, 1931. (Henceforth called *Triṣaṣṭi*.)

<sup>13</sup> C. R. Jain's *Rṣabha Deva* (in English), Delhi, 1929, and Devendra Muni's *Rṣabhadeva : ek pariśīlan* (in Hindi), Agra, 1967, summarize respectively the Digambara and the Śvetāmbara traditions. I am indebted to Devendra's work for references to several commentaries on the *Āvaśyaka*.

<sup>14</sup> This account is missing in the Digambara tradition. See Devendra, 69.

and the latter to Brāhmī, the sister of Bharata. He is thus credited with having been the first to forbid matrimony between twins (a practice alluded to in the R̥gvedic dialogue between Yama and Yamī), and thereby laying the foundations of a new marriage system.

The extinction of the *kalpavṛkṣas* forced the people to look for new sources of food. Rṣabha is credited with the discovery of fire (by friction) and also of tilling and such other activities connected with agriculture. For this the Jain ācāryas have given him the title of *prajā-pati*, the Lord of the beings. He was also responsible for the creation of various professions such as swordmanship (*asi*), writing (*maṣi*), commerce (*vāṇijya*), farming (*kṛṣi*), arts (*vidyā*), and crafts (*śilpa*).<sup>15</sup> From these developed the three castes, viz. the Kṣatriya, Vaiśya, and Śūdra. The institution of the Brahman caste is attributed by the Jain authors not to Rṣabha but to his son Bharata as will be seen below. These professions and the castes transformed the earth from a *bhogabhūmi* (place of enjoyment) into a *karmabhūmi* (place of action). With the decline in worldly goods and the increase in the greed of people, there arose the need of a ruler able to command obedience and dispense justice to all. In fulfilling yet another need of the time Rṣabha became the first king of mankind, comparable to king Mahāsammata of the Pali canon. As a king he laid down the laws and thus became the first lawgiver at the dawn of civilization. Rṣabha was also the first anchorite (*śramaṇa* or *muni*), the first omniscient being (*sarvajña* or *jina*), and the first great teacher of the path of liberation (*tīrthaṅkara*). He totally renounced his worldly life while still young, and became a *digambara* (sky-clad = naked) mendicant. He lived in seclusion and silence, his hair growing long over his shoulders, oblivious of himself and of the world. Hundreds of images, some going back to the close of the Mauryan period, depict this ascetic Rṣabha, showing his upright posture and dishevelled hair, engrossed in meditation and deep trance. His vow of fasting is said to have lasted for almost six months, at the close of which he went around begging for food. He walked the whole length of the Ganges, from Ayodhyā to Hastināpura, but failed to obtain alms proper for a *śramaṇa*. People came forward offering him all the worldly things, including their marriageable daughters, says one Purāṇa,<sup>16</sup> as no one had any experience of attending properly to the needs of a recluse, and the latter would beg his food only in silence. It was not until a whole year had passed that a king named Śreyāṃsa witnessed in his dream an act of charity he had performed in his previous life. Directed by this dream he offered the sage fresh juice of sugar-cane (*ikṣu*) on the third day of the full moon of the month of Vaiśākha, a day sacred to the Jains and celebrated even to this day as *akṣaya-trītyā* 'the Immortal Third'.

Rṣabha continued in this ascetic life for over a thousand years, at the end of which he attained that enlightenment which the Jains identify with omniscience (*kevalajñāna*). He was now a *jina*, a spiritual victor, who had broken for ever the bonds of *samsāra*. But Rṣabha was not an ordinary *jina* content with his own liberation. He had in his previous births practised those virtues which distinguish a *jina* as a *tīrthaṅkara*, a supreme teacher who during his lifetime brings enlightenment to many, and whose teaching lasts for several millenniums guiding the aspirants on the path of liberation. The Jain canon claims that at the time of the *nirvāṇa* of Rṣabha on Mount Kailāśa in the Himalaya, the order of the Jains consisted of 84,000 monks (*śramaṇas*), 300,000 nuns (*śramaṇīs*),

<sup>15</sup> *Ādipurāṇa*, xvi, 179 ff.

<sup>16</sup> *Trīṣaṣṭi*, 178.

305,000 laymen (*śrāvakas*), and as many as 554,000 laywomen (*śrāvikās*), and also that the number of his disciples who had realized omniscience had reached 20,000.<sup>17</sup>

As for the teachings of Ṛṣabha, the Jains maintain that these, being identical with the nature of reality (*vatthusāhavo dhammo*), do not originate from any single person. This *dharma* is eternal but needs to be revived from age to age, a task accomplished by the periodical appearance of the *tīrthaṅkaras*. The teachings of Ṛṣabha are therefore the same as those of his predecessors from bygone ages, and are identical with the preachings of Mahāvīra, the last *tīrthaṅkara* (527 B.C.). These doctrines can be summed up by the concepts of *anekāntavāda*, *ahiṃsā*, and *karmavāda* by which the Jains respectively reject the extremes of eternalism and annihilationism (found as they see it in all other doctrines), adopt the path of total non-violence consisting of the five *mahāvratas* (incompatible with religions advocating sacrifice to gods), and repudiate the theistic doctrines of a creator and his *avatāras* or his grace.

Although several Purāṇas mention Ṛṣabha (together with his illustrious son Bharata) in the genealogy of Manu,<sup>18</sup> the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* appears to be the first and probably the only work to accord him the status of an *aṃśāvatāra* of Viṣṇu. The *Bhāgavata* account is therefore of singular interest as it provides, as nowhere else, the motive for conferring on the saint of a demonstrably heretic religion the high status of an *avatāra*. This account is set in a suitable context of the story of Priyavrata<sup>19</sup> (reminiscent of many a *śramaṇa*, including the Buddha and Mahāvīra) who, although young, had resolved to renounce the world and refused to rule the kingdom of his father, the great Svāyambhuva Manu. Thereupon Brahmā himself, accompanied by the sage Nārada, approached Priyavrata and persuaded him to enjoy the pleasure conferred upon him by the Lord, and to lead the life of a householder (*gṛhastha*) practising devotion and the control of the senses. Priyavrata then agreed to rule the kingdom and took Varhiṣmatī the daughter of Viśvakarman as his wife, who bore him 10 sons. The eldest of these was Agnīdhra who succeeded him to the throne and begot nine sons on an *apsaras* named Pūrvacitti. Their eldest son Nābhi espoused the daughter of Meru named Merudevī (cf. Nābhi and Marudevī of the Jain tradition) and ruled the kingdom after the death of the king Agnīdhra.

Nābhi had no offspring for a long time from his queen Merudevī. He therefore propitiated the Lord (who is sacrifice incarnate) by various sacrificial rites. Pleased by his devotion the Lord Viṣṇu manifested himself in his auspicious form (of four arms adorned with conch, discus, club, and lotus) before the king Nābhi and his queen and the *ṛtviks* at the celebration of the *pravargya* ceremony. The *ṛtviks* duly worshipped the Lord for this extraordinary grace and prayed that 'a son like unto the Lord' be granted to Nābhi and his queen. Being thus implored by venerable *ṛtviks*, the compassionate Lord Viṣṇu addressed them as follows.

'O ye Sages, your words are never futile. Yet you have begged a boon that is not easy of granting inasmuch as, being Supreme, I alone am equal and like unto Myself. Nevertheless, the words of Brahmans must not be falsified as they are my mouth. Not finding anyone else comparable to me, I shall by a portion of My own divine essence descend in the house of king Nābhi.'

Accordingly, the Lord, desirous of pointing out the *dharma* unto the naked

<sup>17</sup> *Kalpasūtra*, 284.

<sup>18</sup> e.g. H. H. Wilson, *The Viṣṇupurāṇa*, London, 1840, 133.

<sup>19</sup> The story of Priyavrata is not found in the *Viṣṇupurāṇa*.

(wind-clad) and celibate *śramaṇa* sages, assuming a pure form descended into the womb of queen Merudevī as Ṛṣabha.<sup>20</sup>

All the divine marks were clearly visible on the person of the child Ṛṣabha. He grew to be a mighty prince endowed with effulgence and fame. Even Indra the king of the gods became envious of his fame and withdrew the seasonal rains from the land of Nābhi. Undaunted, prince Ṛṣabha, the Lord of yoga, by the powers of his *yogamāyā*, caused heavy rain showers in his kingdom thus earning the love and gratitude of all his subjects. The king, gratified by the excellent virtues of his son, established him on the throne and retired to a penance grove with his queen Merudevī, where he spent the remainder of his life in devotion to the Lord Vāsudeva.

The divine Ṛṣabha considered his own country to be a *karmakṣetra*<sup>21</sup> (the field of activity, cf. the Jain *karmabhūmi*) and in order to instruct his subjects in the duties of a householder lived himself for some time in a *gurukula*. Thereafter, having pleased his teachers with gifts he returned home and received a damsel named Jayantī as his queen from Indra. He begot on her 100 sons of great might, the eldest of whom was named Bharata. This Bharata was a great yogin and supremely virtuous, and it was after his name that the land of Ṛṣabha was named Bhāratavarṣa.<sup>22</sup> Of the 99 sons, the following nine, viz. Kuśāvarta, Ilāvarta, Brahmāvarta, Malaya, Ketu, Bhadrāsena, Indrasprh, Vidarbha, and Kīkaṭa became the foremost [warriors] serving Bharata. The following nine, viz. Kavi, Hari, Antarikṣa, Prabuddha, Pippalāyana, Āvirhotra, Draviḍa, Camasa, and Karabhājana became *mahābhāgavatas* or the propagators of the Bhāgavata faith. The remaining 81 sons of Ṛṣabha were humble and fond of performing sacrifices; and as such they became Brahmans of pure actions.<sup>23</sup>

Although king Ṛṣabha was the master of himself and identified himself with the Lord, he undertook many activities like an ordinary mortal in order to instruct the ignorant householders in the time-honoured goals of *dharma*, *artha*, *kāma*, and *mokṣa*. He was fully conversant with the mystical teaching pertaining to the Brahman (or of the *Vedas*), yet he chose to govern his subjects according to the laws (such as *sāma*, *dāna*, etc.) laid down by the Brahmans.<sup>24</sup> He also performed 100 sacrifices complete in every respect according to their prescribed rites.

Once upon a time while wandering, Ṛṣabha arrived in the country of Brahmāvarta where he saw his own sons in the assembly of great Brahmanical sages (*brahmarṣi*). Ṛṣabha instructed them on the value of the human body and how it can be used for austerities that lead one to the eternal bliss of the Brahman. He spoke to them of the knot (*granthi*) forged by the union of man and woman, and showed the path of cutting this knot by renouncing the attachment to one's ego. In what appears to be a summary of the teaching of the

<sup>20</sup> *ako batāyam ṛsayo bhavadbhir avitathagīrbhir varam asulaḥkham abhiyācīto yad amuṣyātmaḥ mayā sadṛśo bhūyād iti. mamāham evābhirūpaḥ kaivalyād athāpi brahmavādo na mṛṣā bhavitum arhatīti mamaiva hi mukhaṃ yad dvijadevakulam. tata Agnīdhriye 'mśakalāyā 'vatarīṣyāmy ātmatulyam anupalabhamānah. iti nīśāmayantīyā Merudevīyāḥ patim abhidhāyāntardadhe Bhagavān. barhiṣi tasminn eva Viṣṇudatta Bhagavān paramarṣibhiḥ prasādito Nābheḥ priyacikīṣayā tad avarodhāyane Merudevīyāḥ dharmān darśayitukāmo vātaraśanānām śramaṇānām ṛṣīnām ūrdhva-manthinām śuklayā tanuvāvatatāra. Bhāg., v, iii, 17–20.*

<sup>21</sup> *atha ha bhagavān Ṛṣabhadevaḥ svavarṣaṃ karmakṣetram anumanyamānah . . . Ibid., v, iv, 8.*

<sup>22</sup> *yeśāṃ khalu mahāyogī Bharato jyeṣṭhaḥ śreṣṭhagūṇa āsīd yenedaṃ varṣaṃ Bhāratam iti vyapadiśanti. Ibid., v, iv, 9.*

<sup>23</sup> *yaviyāṃsa ekāśītir Jāyanteyāḥ pitur ādeśakarā mahāśālīnā mahāśrotrīyā yajñāśīlāḥ karma-vīśuddhā brāhmaṇā babhūvuh. Ibid., v, iv, 13.*

<sup>24</sup> *yady api svaviditāṃ sakaladharmāṃ brahmaṇ guhyāṃ brāhmaṇair darśitamārgena sāmādhībhīr upāyair janatām anuśāśa . . . upacitāḥ sarvair api kratubhir yathopadeśaṃ śatakr̥tva iyāja. Ibid., v, iv, 16–17.*

*Rṣabhāvatāra*, the author of the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* gives in this context a whole chapter consisting of 27 verses <sup>25</sup> stressing the need of renunciation and devotion, the twin doctrines of the *Bhāgavata* cult. The entire section is remarkable for its non-sectarian preaching, unexceptionable on the whole to any person of an ascetic persuasion. Its effect, however, is marred firstly by the admonition of Rṣabha to his sons not to renounce but to serve their eldest brother Bharata with 'mind free from afflictions' (*akliṣṭa-buddhyā*), and next by the following few verses which glorify the Brahmans and raise them even higher than the Lord.

'... human beings are superior to the animals... , devas are superior to men... , Indra is the foremost of the devas... , Brahmā's sons, Dakṣa, etc., are superior to Indra... , Śaṅkara is superior to Dakṣa, etc.,... , Brahmā is superior to Śaṅkara... , Brahmā has his being in Me; and therefore I am superior to Brahmā. I too worship the Brahmans. Thus the Brahmans, being superior to Me, are to be worshipped by all.

'O Brahmans! I do not find any being equal unto the Brahmans... I do not find so much satisfaction in *agnihotra* sacrifice as in receiving what has been offered with faith in the mouth of the Brahmans...' <sup>26</sup>

Having thus admonished his worthy sons, he decided to impart instructions to the great sages (*mahāmuniṇām*) in the exalted path (*dharma*) of a *paramahansa* distinguished for their high order of devotion, knowledge, and asceticism (*bhaktijñāna-vairāgyalakṣaṇam*). Accordingly having installed Bharata on the throne, Lord Rṣabha, with only his naked body as his possession, with dishevelled hair and with the look of a maniac, renounced the world and went away from the country of the Brahmavarta.<sup>27</sup> He took the vow of silence and assumed the guise of an *avadhūta*, and appeared like a *piśāca*, or like an imbecile, deaf and dumb. Wherever he would go, whether to a city or a village, or mountains or forests, wicked people, like flies assailing a wild elephant, would harass him with harsh words and inflict on him indignities, such as throwing at him stones and excreta. He did not, however, pay any attention to such torment for he had realized the unreality of this world. Thus he wandered unperturbed and alone, all over the earth. Having observed that the people were an obstruction to his practice of yoga, and that they could be warded off only by means of a hideous and loathsome way of life, he took up the vow of *ajagara* (residing in one place like a python?), whereby he would drink, eat, and pass excreta at the same place, and his body became covered therewith. He also followed the conduct of a cow, deer, or crow, eating, drinking, or passing urine and excreta, either while standing, sitting, or walking.<sup>28</sup> Thus did divine Rṣabha engage him-

<sup>25</sup> *Bhāg.*, v, v, 1-27.

<sup>26</sup> ... *Bhavaḥ paraḥ so 'tha Viriñcivīryaḥ*  
*sa matparo 'haṁ dvijadevadevaḥ||*  
*na brāhmaṇais tulaye bhūtam anyat*  
*paśyāmi viprāḥ kim ataḥ paraṁ tu/*  
*yasmin nṛbhiḥ prahutaṁ śraddhayāhaṁ*  
*aśnāmi kāmam na tathā 'gnihotre||* *ibid.*, v, v, 22-3.

<sup>27</sup> *upaśamaśīlānām uparatakarmaṇām mahāmuniṇām bhaktijñānavairāgyalakṣaṇam pāra-*  
*mahaṁsyadharmam upaśikṣamānaḥ... urvaritaśarīramātrapari-graha unmatta iva gaganapari-*  
*dhānaḥ prakīrṇakeśa ātmany adhyāropitāhavanīyo Brahmāvartāt pravavrāja. jādāndhamūka-*  
*badhirapiśāconmādakavad avadhūtavaso 'bhibhāṣyamāṇo 'pi janānām grhītamauṇavratas tūṣṇīm*  
*babhūva. Ibid.*, v, v, 28-9.

<sup>28</sup> *anupatham avanicarāpasadaḥ paribhūyamāno makṣikābhir iva vanagajas tarjanatādanāva-*  
*mehanaṣṭhivanagrāvaśukṛdrajahpraksepapūṭivātaduruktaiḥ... kuṭilajaṭilakapīśakeśabhūribhāro*  
*'vadhūtamalinanijaśarīreṇa grahagrhīta ivādrśyata. yarhi vāva sa bhagavān lokam imaṁ yoga-*  
*syāddhā pratīpam ivācakṣānaḥ tatpratīkriyākarma bibhatsitam iti vratam ajagaram āsthitah śayāna*  
*evāśnāti khādaty avamehati hadati sma... evaṁ gomṛgakākacaryayā... Ibid.*, v, v, 30-4.

self in austerities and yoga, and he considered himself at one with the Lord Vāsudeva.

He sojourned in this way in the guise of an *avadhūta*, concealing his divine nature, and wearing various dresses, observing diverse practices, and speaking various dialects. Then with a view to instructing the yogins in the proper method of preparing themselves for death, the divine Ṛṣabha resolved to renounce his own body.<sup>29</sup> He desisted from all activities by realizing the identity of his individual self with the supreme self. Although he had thus renounced all actions, the body of Lord Ṛṣabha, like a potter's wheel moving of itself for some time, went of its own accord from place to place to the countries of southern Kārṇāṭaka, namely Koṅka, Veṅka, and Kuṭaka. There, in the forest adjoining the Kuṭaka mountain, Lord Ṛṣabha wandered like a maniac with his body naked, his hair dishevelled, and his mouth filled with a stone. At that time a dreadful forest fire, kindled by the clashing of bamboos felled by a terrible wind, engulfed the entire forest and burnt down the body of the divine Ṛṣabha.<sup>30</sup>

The foregoing account has much in common with the Jain legend of Ṛṣabha. Both trace his lineage to Nābhi, the son of a *kulakara* in the Jain account and of a Manu in the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*. The latter does not refer to the innovations introduced by Ṛṣabha as believed by the Jains, but uses the word *karmakṣetra* comparable to the Jain term *karmabhūmi*. Both accounts proclaim Bharata as the eldest of the 100 sons, and also as the originator of the name Bhāratavarṣa. The episodes of Ṛṣabha's sermon on renunciation and the subsequent admonition to his sons to serve Bharata seem to echo the more plausible Jain account.<sup>31</sup> In the latter, Bharata is bent upon the policy of conquest and demands submission of his brothers. Offended, they approach their father—now a Jina—for justice, who preaches the virtues of renunciation and receives them in his order of *śramaṇas*. The description of Ṛṣabha as an *avadhūta*, particularly the repeated references to his nakedness and the dishevelled hair, suggest some familiarity on the part of the author of the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* with the images of this *tīrthāṅkara* referred to above. The accounts of the cruel indignities which Ṛṣabha is made to suffer in the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* are no doubt missing in the Jain sources; yet they compare well with similar torments suffered by Mahāvīra, as described in the *Ācārāṅga*,<sup>32</sup> prior to his attainment of the *kevalajñāna*. The Jains will emphatically reject the various 'hideous' vows (e.g. the *ajāgara-vrata*) attributed to Ṛṣabha since they condemn these practices as *mithyāvratas*, unbecoming of a Jain *śramaṇa*. Even so, there is enough of the 'hideous' in the practices of a Jain monk (e.g. the prohibition against bathing and brushing one's teeth) to allow a non-Jain author to introduce those vows in the life of a recluse. The Jain will also not agree that Ṛṣabha (or any Jina for that matter on account of his exalted state) could meet his death in the manner described above. Yet, the Jain veneration for the practice of *sallekhanā* (voluntary death by fasting)<sup>33</sup> is so well known that the author of the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* might consider it legitimate to apply it to the life of so great a saint as Ṛṣabha.

<sup>29</sup> *athaivam akhilalokapālālāmo 'pi vilakṣaṇair jādavad avadhūtaveṣabhāṣācaritair avilakṣitabhaḡavatprabhāvo yogināṃ sāmparāyavidhim anuśikṣyan svakalevaram jihāsuh... uparatā-nuvrttīr upararāma*. Ibid., v, vi, 6.

<sup>30</sup> *tasya ha vā evaṃ muktaliṅgasya bhagavata Ṛṣabhasya yogamāyāvāsanaṃ deha imāṃ jagatīm abhimānābhāsenā saṃkramamānaḥ Koṅka-Veṅka-Kuṭakān daksīṇa-Kārṇāṭakān deśān yadrccchayopagataḥ Kuṭakācalopavana āsyakṛtāśmakavala unmāda iva muktamūrdhajo 'saṃvīta eva vicacāra. atha samīraveḡavidhūtaveṇuvikaṣaṇajātogradāvānalas tadvanam ālehihānaḥ saha tena dadāha*. Ibid., v, vi, 7-8.

<sup>31</sup> *Ādipurāṇa*, xxxiv, 93-156.

<sup>32</sup> *Ācārāṅga*: Jacobi, SBE, xxii, 1884, 79-87.

<sup>33</sup> On *sallekhanā* see R. Williams, *Jaina yoga*, London, 1963, 166 ff.



What distinguishes the *Bhāgavata* legend is the glorification of the Brahman caste through Ṛṣabha, conspicuous by its absence in the Jain account. The Lord Viṣṇu agrees to be born as the son of Nābhi to make sure that the words of the *ṛtviks* are not made futile as they are his mouth. Ṛṣabha himself is cast in the mould of an ideal king following the *āśrama* order. It is emphasized that he rules according to the laws laid down by the Brahmins and even performs 100 sacrifices complete in all respects. Of his 100 sons who are all Kṣatriyas by birth, 81 'become' Brahmins and engage themselves in the activities of a *śrotriya*. Even when Ṛṣabha admonishes his sons to serve Bharata, or praises the ideal of renunciation, he must be made to glorify the Brahmins by declaring that they are higher even to the supreme spirit, and that feeding them is more pleasing to the Lord than the *agnihotra*.

The declared purpose of the *Ṛṣabhāvatāra*, viz. the teaching of the *dharma* to the naked and celibate *śramaṇas*, or teaching the yogins the exalted path of the *paramahansa*, is in no way served by this repeated glorification of the Brahmins. One cannot fail to suspect here a deliberate attempt on the part of the author of the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* to demonstrate to the followers of Ṛṣabha that their traditional anti-Brahmanism was quite inconsistent with the extraordinary devotion of their great saint to the Brahmins, and also his lavish patronage of the Vedic sacrifices. The *śramaṇas* had persisted in making exclusive claims to the role of being omniscient saviours or *tīrthaṅkaras*, who alone showed the true path of renunciation. The *Ṛṣabhāvatāra* appears to be a challenge of the Brahmins to this *śramaṇa* claim. The teacherhood of Ṛṣabha was not denied; indeed it was reaffirmed as if by an official sanction. But it was made abundantly clear that he was a teacher not because of his alleged omniscience, but because he was an *avatāra* of the Brahmanical deity, the prime source of all knowledge, particularly that of salvation. The 'avatārization' of Ṛṣabha was facilitated by the undeniable fact that the *avadhūta* cult had always flourished among the ascetic orders, irrespective of their Śramaṇite, Vaiṣṇavite, or Śaivite persuasion. The creed of the naked ascetics leading celibate lives engaged in yogic trances was known even to the Vedas as is evidenced by the *Keśisūkta* of the tenth book of the Ṛgveda (x, 136). Indeed the words *vātaraśa-nānām muninām* of the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* are directly borrowed from the second verse of this *sūkta*:

*mūnayo vātaraśanāḥ piśāṅgā vasate mālā/  
vātasyānu dhrājīm yanti yād devāso āvikṣata//*

It must, however, be noted that neither in this nor in any other Vedic hymn is the word *śramaṇa* linked with the *vātaraśana-munis*. As a matter of fact, the word *śramaṇa* is not encountered until the time of the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (14.7.1.22 = *Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad* 4.3.22) and the term *paramahansa* is of still later date. As for the name Ṛṣabha, it is interesting to note that it is not included in the list of seven ṛṣis (viz. Jūti, Vātajūti, Viprajūti, Vṛṣāṇaka, Karikrata, Etasā, and Ṛṣyaśṛṅga) enumerated by Sāyaṇa as the respective authors of the seven verses of the *Keśisūkta*. The Ṛgveda has three hymns—III, 13 and 14 addressed to Agni, and IX, 71 to Pavamāna Soma—credited to a seer named Ṛṣabha; but he is a son of Viśvamitra (*Ṛṣabho Vaiśvāmitraḥ*), a detail missing in the account of the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* and his hymns have no connexions whatsoever with asceticism. The word *ṛṣabha* is no doubt of common occurrence in the Vedic hymns; but contrary to the belief of many modern Jain apologists,<sup>34</sup> there is no conclusive evidence to show that it was ever used as

<sup>34</sup> e.g. Hiralal Jain, *Bhāratīya saṃskṛti me Jainadharm kā yogadān*, Bhopal, 1962, 15 ff.

a substantive or as a name of a person. It appears highly probable therefore that it was the author of the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* who with great ingenuity brought the three terms (*Vātaraśanā munayaḥ*, *śramaṇa*, and *paramahansa*) together and applied them with considerable advantage to the life of Rṣabha who was widely worshipped among the *śramaṇas* of his time.

It is not difficult to identify these *śramaṇas* of the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*. They could not have been the Buddhists for the simple reason that Rṣabha (notwithstanding a stray reference to that name in the *Mahāvastu*, ed. Senart, I, p. 137, l. 2) was not one of their saints. The *Bhāgavata* version of Rṣabha's death with a stone in his mouth (an indulgence not allowed by the Jain monastic rules) might suggest that this one motif derives from the sect of the Ājīvikas whose leader Makkhali Gosāla while on his deathbed is reputed to have held a mango stone in his mouth.<sup>35</sup> But there is no evidence that the Ājīvikas ever worshipped Rṣabha as one of their teachers, and the sect was by this time moribund. This leaves only the Jains, the only *śramaṇa* school that survived in India, who worshipped Rṣabha even more than they worshipped their last *tīrthāṅkara* Mahāvīra, and whose lay devotees occupied seats of power in the Deccan and Kārnāṭaka at the time of the composition of the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*.

Indeed, there is no great mystery hiding the identity of the Jains as the *śramaṇas* of the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*. The latter makes it almost explicit in the following invectives presented as a prophecy with which it concludes the story of the *Rṣabhāvatāra*.

‘When the King of Koṅka, Veṅka, and Kuṭaka, called Arhat, comes to hear of this conduct of the divine Rṣabhadeva, he too will give himself over to it. Indeed, since irreligion will thrive in the Kali age, the king, confounded by inevitable fate, will abandon the security of his own religion and in consequence of his deluded understanding will promote the heretical and evil ways of the *Pākhaṇḍas*.

It is for this reason that villainous people, confounded by the illusion-provoking power of God, will forsake the duties of purity and good conduct that are enjoined upon them and take up at will wicked vows that mock the gods, such as not bathing, not rinsing their mouths, non-purity and pulling out their hair. With their understanding thus corrupted by the irreligion-rife Kali age, they will forever deride Brahman, the Brahmans, the Lord of the sacrifice, and other people. Then, having placed their trust in the blind man's leading a blind man that is the maintenance of one's own world by upstart non-Vedic rites, they will themselves fall into the blind darkness of hell.

This incarnation has the purpose of helping those who abound in the quality of *rajas* to obtain salvation, and many verses are sung in its praise.’<sup>36</sup>

These imprecations confirm the astute observation made by the celebrated grammarian Patañjali (150 B.C.) that the *śramaṇas* and the Brahmans are ‘eternal enemies’ like the snake and mongoose.<sup>37</sup> The *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, as noticed by Wilson,<sup>38</sup> is most probably following here the lead given by the

<sup>35</sup> See A. L. Basham, *History and doctrines of the Ājīvikas*, London, 1951, 63.

<sup>36</sup> *yasya kilānucaritam upākarnya Koṅka-Veṅka-Kuṭakānāṃ rājā 'rahaṇa nāmopaśikṣya kalāv adharma utkrīṣyamāṇe bhavīṭavyena vimohitāḥ svadharmapatham akuto bhayaṃ apahāya kupathapākhaṇḍam asamañjasaṃ nījamañisayā mandāḥ sampravartayīṣyate. yena ha vāva kalau manu-jāpasadā devamāyāmohitāḥ svavidhīniyogaśaucacārītravīhīnā devahelanāny apavratāni nījanī-jecchayā grhṇānā asnānānācamanāśaucakeśolluñcanādīni kalīnā 'dharmabāhulenopahatādhiyo brahmabrāhmaṇyayaḥ puruṣaloka vidūṣakāḥ prāyeṇa bhaviṣyanti. te ca hy arvāktanayā nījalokayātrayā 'ndhaparamparayā āśvastās tamasy andhe svayam eva prapatīṣyanti. ayamāvatāro rajasopaplutakaivalyopāśikṣaṇārthah . . . Bhāg., v, vi, 9-11.*

<sup>37</sup> F. Kielhorn, *Vyākaraṇa Mahābhāṣya of Patañjali*, Bombay, 1892, I, 476.

<sup>38</sup> *The Viṣṇupurāṇa*, 133, n. 7.

*Viṣṇupurāṇa* which brackets all the heretic schools (viz. the Jains, the Buddhists, and the Cārvākas) and condemns them together for their opposition to the Vedas, the Brahmins, and the sacrifices. However, the *Viṣṇupurāṇa* nowhere mentions the heretic teachers by their names, and certainly does not call them the *avatāras* of Viṣṇu. Instead it describes these anonymous teachers as 'fraudulent devices' employed by the Lord to misguide the *asuras* and wean them away from the Vedic path.<sup>39</sup> What distinguishes the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* is that it persists in imprecating the *śramaṇas* (particularly the Jains) while it elevates one of their great teachers, viz. Ṛṣabha, to the status of an *avatāra*. An inquiry into the circumstances which might have led the proponents of the Bhāgavata cult to assert the 'divinity' of a *śramaṇa* teacher, particularly of Ṛṣabha, is of considerable interest for a study of the mutual borrowing of two distinct and rival faiths.

If the *Buddhāvātāra* was any precedent, then Mahāvīra, a contemporary of the Buddha and the last of the 24 *tīrthaṅkaras*, should have been the natural choice for a '*Jināvātāra*'. Yet the author of the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* chose to give a prehistoric figure like Ṛṣabha precedence over Mahāvīra. The latter is hardly ever mentioned in any Brahmanical scriptures including the Epics and the Purāṇas. Presumably Mahāvīra, on account of his adherence to the theory of the soul (*ātman*), was much less hostile to the Vedic tradition than the *anātmavādin* Buddha, and consequently less well known. Even among his followers, there never was an exclusive cult of Mahāvīra, for it is well known that even during his lifetime he was worshipped together with Pārśva (the twenty-third *tīrthaṅkara* according to the tradition) who preceded him by some 250 years. The same thing cannot be said of Gautama the Buddha. There is, no doubt, a Buddhist tradition, authenticated by the Niglivā pillar edict of Aśoka (pertaining to the Buddha Koṇāgamana), which speaks of six and, at a later date, of even 24 Buddhas who preceded the historical Gautama, the Buddha. But unlike Mahāvīra Gautama was, and has always been, considered supreme in the hierarchy of the Buddhist pantheon of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. On the other hand, the *tīrthaṅkara* Ṛṣabha of the Jains has much in common with the Buddha Dīpaṅkara, the first of the 25 Buddhas of the present age. The latter according to the *Buddhavaṃsa* also appeared at the beginning of the new age and was the first to renounce the world and to show the path of *nirvāṇa*. Both are credited with having been the first teachers of the last of the saints of their respective traditions. Thus Dīpaṅkara is said to have initiated into the *bodhi-sattva* path a young Brahman named Sumedha, the future Siddhārtha Gautama. Similarly, Ṛṣabha is said to have made the prophecy that Marīci (a son of Bharata) would become the last *tīrthaṅkara* and would be known as Mahāvīra.<sup>40</sup> In fact the legendary biographies of Gautama and Mahāvīra begin with the narration of their births as Sumedha and Marīci respectively.<sup>41</sup> In view of their relationship (of a *śāstr* and *śiṣya*), Dīpaṅkara would be expected to occupy a position higher than his (once) disciple Gautama. This is not, however, borne out by the Buddhist tradition where Dīpaṅkara remains a minor figure, and is practically unknown to the Brahmanical world. By contrast, Ṛṣabha comes to be given a higher status among his equals (the remaining *tīrthaṅkaras*), a special kind of image is reserved for depicting him and his illustrious son Bāhubalī,<sup>41</sup>

<sup>39</sup> *ibid.*, xviii.

<sup>40</sup> *Triṣaṣṭi*, i, 353 ff.

<sup>41</sup> Also called Gommateśvara. See Fergusson, *History of Indian and Eastern architecture*, London, 1891, 267 ff., and A. L. Basham, *The wonder that was India*, London, 1954, plate LIX.

the younger brother of Bharata, and he is chosen by a rival faith for the distinction of an *avatāra*.

It must, however, be noted that the prominence given to Rṣabha even among the Jains is of a much later date than that of their canonical literature. The extant canonical texts (e.g. the *Kalpasūtra*) contain only the descriptions of the five traditionally auspicious occasions of his life (viz. the conception, birth, renunciation, enlightenment, and *nirvāṇa*) and a few significant statements to the effect that he was the first king, the first anchorite, the first omniscient being, and the first *tīrthaṅkara*. The other details of his life, as noted above, or of his son Bharata which will follow, are to be found only in the commentaries beginning with the *Āvaśyaka-niryukti* of Bhadrabāhu II, written in the sixth century A.D. It is therefore not surprising that Rṣabha should remain unnoticed in the ancient Brahmanical literature, including the *Mahābhārata*. Nor is it likely that Bhadrabāhu's narration would draw the attention of the Brahmans to the legend of Rṣabha. Firstly, the account is in Prakrit and appears in a commentary on a text called *Āvaśyaka*, used primarily by Jain monks in their daily ritual and hence not easily accessible to the public abroad. Secondly, there is nothing polemical in the whole account which could have offended a votary of the Bhāgavata cult.

The imprecations quoted above leave no doubt that the author of the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* had before him a hostile community of the devotees of Rṣabha which had sought to usurp the traditional role of the Brahmans, under the patronage of a king of Kārṇāṭaka, presumably a convert to the Jain faith. Of course there never was a king named Arhat as the author of the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* would have us believe. The word *arhat* is a synonym for a Jain saint. But this does not preclude the possibility of a real king who was a Jain and who might have patronized the Jains much to the chagrin of the Brahmans of South India where the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* is believed to have originated. The exact date of the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* is not known, but it is now generally recognized as a work of the tenth or the early eleventh century A.D. Although the Jain inscriptions of this period claim a large number of patrons among the rulers of Kārṇāṭaka, the only person that fits the description of the heretical king Arhat of the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* is the Rāṣṭrakūṭa king Amoghavarṣa I who ruled from Mānyakheta in the ninth century (A.D. 814–77).<sup>42</sup> It was under the patronage of this Jain king, an apostate from his traditional Vaiṣṇava faith, that Ācārya Jināsena<sup>43</sup>—himself a Digambara *muni*—wrote his epoch-making *Ādipurāṇa* on the life of Rṣabha and his son Bharata. It is highly probable that this work was an important source of the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*.

Through this voluminous Purāṇa, Jināsena not only criticized the Brahmanical doctrine of the creator and his creation (*īśvarakartr̥tvavāda*), but openly challenged the authority of the Vedic scriptures, rejected the divinity of the Vedic gods, repudiated the efficacy of the Brahmanical rites and rituals, and above all ridiculed the claim of the Brahmans to a superior social rank. Exploiting fully the rich potentialities in the legend of Rṣabha, the first *sarvajña* (omniscient one), Jināsena sought, as it were, to write a new history of the world, presided over by a Jain Brahmā, who pronounced a set of Jain Vedas, instituted a Jain division of the castes and duties, and proclaimed a series of Jain *saṃskāras* complete with Jain rites and litany. Of course, this was not the Brahmanical Brahmā who in the words of Jināsena 'had made an ass of himself by desiring

<sup>42</sup> See A. S. Altekar, *Rāṣṭrakūṭas and their times*, second ed., Poona, 1967.

<sup>43</sup> *ibid.*, 88–9.

his own daughter Sarasvatī '—an incest acknowledged by the Purāṇas—but the Lord Rṣabha who had attained the true Brahman, viz. omniscience. Having thus asserted the 'divinity' of this exalted human being, Jināsena proceeds to appropriate for Rṣabha the choicest words of praise hitherto reserved for the Brahmā of Hindu mythology.<sup>44</sup> Rṣabha is *hiraṇya-garbha* as there was a shower of gold at the time of his conception. He is *prajāpati*, *vidhātṛ*, and *sraṣṭṛ* as he was the first king, the first to invent fire and the means of livelihood, and the first to devise the social structure suitable for a *karmakṣetra*. He is *svayambhū* as his spiritual 'rebirth' did not depend upon the instruction of any teacher; he was self-taught. He is also the *purāṇapuruṣa* or the primordial man, as he was the first to realize perfection, and *saḥasrākṣa* and *viśvataścakṣuḥ* as he perceived everything by his omniscience. In short, he was to be called the Ādideva or the First Lord, the founder of human civilization and the dispenser of the laws both secular and spiritual. As if he was anticipating the 'avatārization' of his hero, Jināsena further calls him Acyuta (a name of Viṣṇu) or immovable, a sign of being a *vītarāga*. He is also described as *trinetra*, *bhavāntaka*, and *yogīśvara*, titles especially applicable to Śiva. It is interesting to note in this connexion that Jināsena applies to the *digambara* Rṣabha the Vedic term *vātaraśana*, and characterizes his disciples as *munayo vātaraśanāḥ*,<sup>45</sup> manifestly a quotation from the *Keśisūkta* of the R̥gveda, which might have suggested the idea of a new *avatāra* to the author of the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*. Having thus invested Rṣabha with the divinity of the Hindu trinity, without of course making him either the creator, the sustainer, or the destroyer, Jināsena claims that the Vedas are not what the Brahmans chant at the slaughter of the sacrificial animals, but the *Dvādaśāṅgapravacana* or the scripture of the Jains, pronounced by the *Ādideva*.<sup>46</sup> As for the castes, they had no divine origin at all. According to Jināsena there is only one *jāti* called the *manuṣyajāti* or the human caste, but divisions arise on account of their different professions.<sup>47</sup> The caste of the Kṣatriyas came to be established when Rṣabha assumed the powers of a king and held weapons in his arms. The Vaiśya and the Śūdra castes arose subsequently as he invented different means of livelihood and people were trained in diverse arts and crafts.

The Jain accounts unanimously declare that the caste of the Brahmans was not instituted by Rṣabha but by his son Bharata, the first *cakravartin*.<sup>48</sup> This agrees well with the Jain scheme according to which only those members of the first three castes (*kṣatriya*, *vaiśya*, and *śūdra*) who were initiates in the five vows of a layman (*anuvratas*) were entitled to be called *dvijas* or the 'twice-born'. The formation of a class of such initiates would be possible only after the founding of the order (*saṃgha*) of the *śrāvaka*s or the laity by the *tīrthaṅkara* Rṣabha. The Prakrit commentaries on the *Āvaśyaka* take recourse to a folk etymology to explain the origin of the word *māhāna* (Sanskrit *brāhmaṇa*). It is said that Bharata on his return from his world conquest wished to share his

<sup>44</sup> See the *stotra* of 1008 names of Rṣabha in *Ādipurāṇa*, xxv, 99–217.

<sup>45</sup> *munayo vātaraśanāḥ padam ūrdhvaṃ vidhatsavaḥ/ tvāṃ mūrdhavadindino bhūtvā tad upāyam upāsate// Ādipurāṇa*, II, 64. *digvāsā vātaraśano nirgranthēṣo digambarah/ ibid.*, xxv, 204.

<sup>46</sup> *śrutaṃ suvhitam vedo dvādaśāṅgam akalmaṣam/ himsopadeśi yad vākyaṃ na vedo 'sau kṛtāntavāk// purāṇam dharmasāstraṃ ca tat syād vadhaniṣedhi yat/ vadhopadeśi yat tat tu jñeyam dhūrtapraṇetrkam// ibid.*, xxxix, 22–3.

<sup>47</sup> *manuṣyajātir ekaiva jātīnāmodayodbhavā/ vṛttibhedāhitād bhedāc cāturvīdhyam ihāśnute// ibid.*, xxxviii, 45.

<sup>48</sup> *utpādītās trayo varṇās tadā tenādivedhasā/ ibid.*, xvi, 183.

See xxxviii which deals with *dvijanmanām utpattiḥ*.

wealth with his brothers who had already become ascetics in the monastic order of Rṣabha. Bharata approached them with a cart load of food and other gifts, but was grieved to hear that Jain ascetics could not partake of food specially prepared for them (*uddiṣṭa-āhāratyāga*). Since it is wrong for householders to receive alms thus freely given, Indra the king of gods suggested to Bharata that the food might be offered to the virtuous initiates who had taken the *aṇuvratas* of a householder. Bharata gratefully fed them and invited them to have their meals for ever at his place. Henceforth they were to forsake other means of livelihood which involved *himsā* (e.g. tilling, etc.) and engage themselves in activities like the study and teaching of the scriptures, worship of the Jina, etc. They kept vigil on the king's conduct by reminding him 'you are conquered (by the passions); fear increases, therefore do not kill, do not kill (*mā haṇa*)'. They thus came to be called the *māhaṇas* or the Brahmins.<sup>49</sup>

Fanciful as it is, the explanation is indicative of what the Jains expected of a Brahmin and why they would support the widespread custom of feeding Brahmin householders. Jināsena ignores the word *brāhmaṇa* and concentrates on the term *dvija* which affords him a chance to describe in great detail (XXXVIII–XLII, in all 1,113 *ślokas*) the corpus of 98 *saṃskāras* (sanctifying ceremonies) together with their prescribed rites, the performance of one which, called the *upanīti* (initiation) conferred upon an ordinary man the status of a 'twice-born'. There is no mention of the feeding of the Brahmins in the account of the *Ādipurāṇa*. Instead, Bharata wished to find out the true initiates and devised a way of testing their devotion. He deliberately had the courtyard of his palace strewn with fresh flowers and sprouting grain and invited the citizens for a feast on a sacred day. Those who were careless in the observance of their vows walked across the courtyard disregarding the life in the vegetable kingdom. Those who were virtuous did not enter the palace lest they should destroy the subtle life and thus infringe their vow of non-violence. Bharata had them invited by a suitable path, honoured them, and encouraged them to accept one or more of the 11 stages of spiritual progress (*pratimā*) which would bring them close to the discipline of a monk. In recognition of their new status (*varṇalābha*) he conferred upon them the title of *dvija* and confirmed it by investing them with sacred threads (*yajñopavīta*) which indicated the number of *pratimās* they had assumed.<sup>50</sup>

Speaking of such *dvijas*, Jināsena states that these indeed are the true children of Jina and deserve to be called *devabrāhmaṇas*, the divine Brahmins worthy of worship. Anticipating a hostile reaction from the traditional Brahmins to this creed of a 'Jain Brahmin', Jināsena adds:

'Now should a so-called Brahmin through his vanity of birth confront him [a Jain Brahmin] and say: "Well sir, did you become a god today all of a sudden? Are you not the son of So-and-so, is not your mother the daughter of So-and-so, that you should put your nose in the air and dare to walk about disregarding a person like me? What great miracle happened to you by your initiation into the Jain order?—you still walk on the earth and not in the sky!". Let him be told: "Please listen, you so-called Brahmin, to our divine origin. Lord Jina is our father, and his pure knowledge is our womb. We are therefore

<sup>49</sup> *Āvaśyaka-cūrṇi* and *Āvaśyaka-Maladhāri-vṛtti* quoted in Devendra's *Rṣabhadeva*, 87–8. Also *Triṣaṣṭi*, I, 343 ff.

<sup>50</sup> *teṣāṃ kṛtāṇi cihnāṇi sūtraiḥ padmāhvayān nidheḥ / upāttair brahmasūtrāhvair ekād ekādaśāntakaiḥ / guṇabhūmikṛtād bhedāt klptayajñopavītīnām / satkāraḥ kriyate smaiṣāṃ avratāś ca bahiḥ kṛtāḥ* // *Ādipurāṇa*, XXXVIII, 21–2.

truly born as gods, but if you find others of similar description, be free to call them also by the same title ”'.<sup>51</sup>

Returning to the narrative, we learn that after a long time had passed it occurred to Bharata that it was wrong of him to have instituted a caste of the ‘twice-born’ without first obtaining the advice of the Lord R̥ṣabha. He therefore approached him and said:

‘Sir, I have created a class of the twice-born, the best among the householders who follow the rules laid down by you for the laity. I have also invested them with sacred threads, the sign of their vows, according to the stages of their spiritual progress (*guṇa-karma-vibhāgaśah*). It was indeed childish of me, O Lord, that I should have presumed to do this while the Lord was still present with us. May the Lord please tell me if it was opportune and also point out to me the virtues and vices of this caste’.<sup>52</sup>

The answer as given in the *Ādipurāṇa* can almost be anticipated. It is one more prophecy of the evil things to follow, not altogether different either in spirit or in letter from the one we have encountered above in the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*.

‘O Son, that which has been done is good indeed, and moreover, the worship of pious Brahmans is good too. However, there will be some harmful consequences about which you must be informed. You have created the Brahman class, who will be righteous teachers as long as the Kṛta age endures, but when the Kali age draws near there will be backsliding teachers who, out of arrogance of their high birth, will embrace the very opposite of the right path. These people, full of the arrogance of their rank, will claim to be most excellent among men and soon, hankering after wealth, will delude the world with their false scriptures. The favoured treatment which they will enjoy will increase their presumptuousness and make them puffed up with a false pride, so that they will lead men astray as they themselves fashion false religious treatises.

They will be so short-sighted in that they will promote changes for the worse at the end of the age, and, their minds clouded by evil, they will become foes of religion. As they delight in injury to life and relish eating of honey and meat these wicked people will, alas, promote the *dharma* of action, and full of evil hopes, corrupt the *dharma* of non-violence in favour of the *dharma* of injunctions (*codanā*). As the Yuga progresses there will be rogues blasphemously wearing

<sup>51</sup> *atha jātīmadāveśāt kaścīd enaṃ dvijabruvaḥ/  
brūyād evaṃ kim adyaiva devabhūyaṃ gato bhavān//  
tvam āmuṣyāyaṇaḥ kin na kiṃ te 'mbā 'muṣya putrikā/  
yenaivam unnaso bhūtvā yāsy asatkṛtya madvidhān//  
jātīḥ saiva kuḷaṃ tac ca so 'si yo 'si pragetanaḥ/  
tathāpi devatātmānam ātmānam manyate bhavān//  
devatātipitragṇikāryeṣvaprayato bhavān/  
gurudvijātīdevānāṃ praṇāmāc ca parāṇmukhaḥ/  
dīkṣāṃ jainīṃ prapannasya jātāḥ ko 'tiśayaḥ tava/  
yato 'dyāpi manuṣyas tvaṃ pādacārī mahīṃ sprśan//  
ity upārūḍhasaṃrambham upālābāḥ sa kenacit/  
dadāty uttaram ity asmai vacobhir yuktipeśalaiḥ//  
śrūyatām bho dvijammanya tvayā 'smad divyasambhavaḥ/  
jīno janayitā 'smākaṃ jñānaṃ garbho 'tinirmalaḥ//  
tatrārhatīṃ tridhā bhīnām śaktiṃ traiguṇyasamśrītām/  
svasatkṛtya samudbhūtā vayaṃ saṃskārajanmanā//  
ayonīsambhavās tena devā eva na mānuṣāḥ/  
vayaṃ, vayaṃ ivānye 'pi santi cet brūhi tadvidhān//* *Ādipurāṇa*, xxxix, 108–16.

<sup>52</sup> *mayā sraṣṭā dvijanmānaḥ śrāvakācāracuñcavaḥ/  
tvadgūtopāsakādhyāyasūtramārgānugāmināḥ//  
doṣaḥ ko 'tra guṇaḥ ko 'tra kiṃ etat sāmpratam na vā/  
dolāyamānam iti me manaḥ sthāpaya niścītau//* *ibid.*, xli, 30–3.

the sacred thread and eagerly engaged in the killing of life, thereby obstructing the right path.

Therefore, although the creation of the Brahman class is not of itself harmful today, it does contain the seed of harm as yet buried in the future, because impious heretics will be ushered forth. Nevertheless, although this seed of harm is truly there for the end of the age, there is no cause for removing it at present for you have not transgressed against the nature of *dharma*.<sup>53</sup>

The 'Jainization' of Brahmā in the person of Rṣabha and the consequent 'Vaiṣṇavization' of that Jina through the device of the *avatāra* is a fine example of a vain drive towards the syncretism of two rival faiths. The waves of the *bhakti* movement that had swept over the whole range of Indian life finally overtook the atheist Jains and forced them to deify, as it were, their human *tīrthāṅkaras* or face the peril of extinction. Probably the move brought to the surface the emotional hunger of the Jain laity for an object of worship more gracious and glamorous than merely the austere figure of an exalted human teacher. Jinasena very skilfully provided the Jain laity with a new identity of a specially honoured caste of 'neo-Brahmans', a new book of codes in the guise of his Purāṇa, and a new image of the Jina endowed with a grandeur and majesty that could easily compete with the Hindu trinity. To be sure, the *tīrthāṅkaras*, like the Buddha of the Pali canon, had always been surrounded by heavenly attendants like Indra and Kubera who made special appearances on the five great occasions like the *kalyāṇakas*. But the new Jina was to be endowed with additional miraculous powers (*prātihāryas*) attesting to his newly acquired 'divinity'. He sits immobilized, as it were, on a lotus seat in the middle of a circular assembly called *samavasaraṇa* specially designed by the gods and is miraculously visible on all four sides. He is free from hunger and thirst, fatigue and sleep, and remains totally engrossed in the bliss of his omniscience. There is no actual preaching of a sermon. Yet an involuntary resonant sound (*divya-dhvani*) of the *OM* proceeds from his mouth answering all questions simultaneously to the satisfaction of the audience.<sup>54</sup> Indeed the Jina of the *Ādipurāṇa* has much in common with the latter-day Buddha of the *Lalitavistara*. Yet, unlike the latter whose new image was a result of a new doctrine of the three bodies (*trikāya*), the 'divinity' of the Jina was purely adventitious, unwarranted by the doctrine, imposed externally by the devout. The informed Jains were as much impressed by this superfluous accretion as the Bhāgavatas were by the *Rṣabhāvatāra*. For the Jina Rṣabha remained essentially a 'sky-clad' human being, his glory consisting exclusively in omniscience,<sup>55</sup> a distinction denied by the Jains to Brahmā, Śiva, or Viṣṇu or to one of his manifold *avatāras* whose

<sup>53</sup> *sādhū vatsa kṛtaṃ sādhu dhārmikadvijapūjanaṃ/  
kintu doṣānuṣaṅgo 'tra ko 'py asti sa nīṣaṃyatām// ...  
tataḥ kalīyuge 'bhyaṛne jātivādāvalepataḥ/  
bhraṣṭācārāḥ prapatsyante sanmārgapratyanīkatām//  
te 'mī jātimaḍāviṣṭā vyaṃ lokādhikā iti/  
purā durāgamair lokaṃ mohayanti dhanāśayā// ...  
ahiṃsālakṣaṇaṃ dharmam dūṣayitvā durāśayāḥ/  
codanālakṣaṇaṃ dharmam poṣayisyanty amī bata//  
pāpasūtradhārā dhūrtāḥ prānimāraṇatāparāḥ/  
vartsyadyuge pravartsyanti sanmārgaparipanthinaḥ//  
dvijātisarjanaṃ tasmān nādyā yady api doṣakṛt/  
syād doṣabijam āyatyām kupākhandaḥpravartanāt// ibid., xli, 45-54.*

<sup>54</sup> *Ādipurāṇa*, xxiv, 80-5.

<sup>55</sup> Samantabhadra, for instance, is explicit in his praise of the Jina as the teacher of truth: *devāgamanabhoyānacāmarādivibhūṭayāḥ/  
māyādīṣv api dr̥ṣyante nātas tvam asi no mahān//  
sa tvam evāsi nirdoṣo yuktiśāstrāvirodhivāk// ... (Devāgamastotra).*



volatile careers clearly exhibited their subjection to passions and disqualified them as the teachers of truth. Akalaṅka, a celebrated tenth-century logician, sums up the Jain search for a true God in his famous stotra <sup>56</sup> to a Jina.

‘ They call him Brahmā,  
Yet his mind was filled  
with passion for Urvaśī the nymph.  
Behold him move with a bowl for food,  
and a gourd for water !  
Himself a disciple,  
what can he teach an ascetic like me ?

My Brahmā is the one  
devoid of the heat of passion  
free from hunger and thirst,  
pure and perfect.’ <sup>57</sup>

‘ They call him Śiva (the auspicious) and say :  
“ He has burnt to ashes the three worlds  
with blazing fire of anger kindled by the Lord of Love,  
he dances like a maniac  
on the burning grounds of cemeteries,  
has a son—the great Guha,  
the commander of the gods’ armies ”.

What is he to me ?  
Śaṅkara for me is the one  
who has extinguished all fear,  
lust, delusion, sorrow and anger,  
the all-knower, the bringer of peace to all.’ <sup>58</sup>

‘ They call him Viṣṇu (the all-pervasive) and say :  
“ He is the one who with mere fingernails  
forcefully tore the chest of the lord of the demons,  
and wrought the destruction of the Kauravas  
by charioteering for Arjuna in the Great War.”

Not for me is he a Viṣṇu :  
The great Viṣṇu is he alone, the omniscient one,  
whose infinite knowledge  
pervades the entire world of knowables,  
unimpeded by time and space.’ <sup>59</sup>

<sup>56</sup> *Akalaṅkastotra* (see *Nitya-namittika-pāṭhāvalī*, Mahāvīrāśrama, Karanja, 1956).

<sup>57</sup> *Urvaśyām udapādi rāgabahulam ceto yadīyam punaḥ/  
pātrīdanḍakamandaluprabhṛtayo yasyākṛtārthasthitim//  
āvīrbhāvayitum bhavanti, sa katham Brahmā bhaven mādrśām/  
kṣutṛṣṇāśramarāgaragarahito Brahmā kṛtārtho ’stu naḥ//* *ibid.*, 4.

<sup>58</sup> *dagdham yena puratrayam śarabhavā tivrārciṣā vahninā/  
yo vā nrtyati mattavat pīrvane yasyātmajo vā Guhaḥ//  
so ’yam kim mama Śaṅkaro bhayatrṣāroṣārtimohakṣayam/  
kṛtvā yaḥ sa tu sarvavit tanubhṛtām kṣemaṅkaraḥ Śaṅkaraḥ//* *ibid.*, 2.

<sup>59</sup> *yatnād yena vidāritam kararuhair daityendravakṣasthalam/  
sārathyena Dhanañjayasya samare yo ’mārayat Kauravān//  
nāsau Viṣṇur anekakālaviṣayam yaj jñānam avyāhatam/  
viśvam vjāpya vijrmbhate sa tu Mahāviṣṇuḥ sadeṣṭo mama//* *ibid.*, 3.

‘Whoever knows all that is to be known,  
 And sees beyond the billowing ocean of births,  
 Whose words, not marred by inconsistencies,  
 Stand supreme in truthful purity,  
 Such a man do I revere, beholding in him  
 One worthy of exceeding reverence, vessel of virtues,  
 In whom the taint of hatred is effaced :  
 Whether Buddha or Mahāvīra, Brahmā, Viṣṇu, or Śiva.’<sup>60</sup>

<sup>60</sup> *yo viśvaṃ veda vedyaṃ janana-jalanidher bhaṅginah pāradraṣṭā/  
 paurvāparyāvairuddhaṃ vacanam anupamaṃ niṣkalaṅkaṃ yadiyam//  
 taṃ vande sādhuvandyaṃ sakalagūṇanidhiṃ dhvastadoṣadvīṣantaṃ/  
 Buddhaṃ vā Vardhamānaṃ Śatadalanīlayaṃ Keśavaṃ vā Śivaṃ vā//* ibid., 9.